DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 129 816 SP 010 531

AUTHOR Barney, Robert Knight
TITLE The Allen File: Landmark in Nineteenth Century American Physical Education.
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 25p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *American History; *Educational History; *Exercise (Physiology); History; *Physical Education
IDENTIFIERS Allen (Mary); Allen (Nathaniel T); Gymnasitcs; Massachusetts

ABSTRACT

America's approach to physical education and exercise in the schools is reflected in the contributions of two 19th-century physical educators named Allen, one of fairly major importance and one of less importance. Perhaps the most significant contributions to the development of school physical education were made by Nathaniel Topliff Allen at the "Allen School" in West Newton, Massachusetts. The Allen School's undertakings in the areas of exercise and sport reflected the educational practice of its founding fathers-Horace Mann, Cyrus Pierce, and Nathaniel Allen, whose collective wisdom, coupled with the physical presence of Dioclesian Lewis and Catharine Beecher and the interpretations of physical culture expressed by Dr. William A. Alcott, promulgated an educational philosophy that provided a school setting progressive in spirit and liberal in outlook. The Allen School existed for nearly 75 years, during which time it showcased the most progressive, innovative, and educationally sound approaches to the subject of school physical education yet seen in the Western hemisphere. The other Allen in the development of physical education was Mary Allen, the proprietor and director of the Allen School of Gymnastics in downtown Boston. In noting Miss Allen's system of exercise and her contributions to physical education in nineteenth century Boston, school officials stated that Mary Allen maintained a large and well-appointed gymnasium, where she put into practice a system of gymnastic training having many original and useful features. Others have felt that her gymnastic program was not particularly new or innovative for its time and that it borrowed heavily on the systems of Ling, Dioclesian Lewis, and Delsarte. (MM)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED129816

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

THE ALLEN FILE: LANDMARK IN NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICAN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

ROBERT KNIGHT BARNEY

Physical education as a genuine curricular entity in public school programming for schoolchildren and as a course of study for prospective teachers of the subject, is now well into its second century of history in North America. The course of events surrounding the phenomena referred to above, with but few exceptions, have been twentieth century developments. Those "few" exceptions, largely nineteenth century in nature, form the foundation for the heritage of school physical education and physical education teacher preparation.

Duly investigated and standing the test of time as the embryo episodes from which the events herein analyzed evolved, were the experiences of the Round Hill School in Northamption, Massachusetts between the years 1823 and 1834[1] and the Normal School for Physical Education under the direction of Dioclesian Lewis in Boston between 1861 and 1868.[2] Be that as it may, the melange of events in the same vein as those noted above which helped to shape the nineteenth century physical education record included two developments which have received but fleeting notice from the searching inquisitiveness of sport and physical education historians. The two dramas are separate in themselves but the two individuals who played the most dominant roles in the respective scenarios reflected some very similar identities: (1) both were citizens of the same state -- Massachusetts, (2) both

---

[1] Bennett, Bruce L., "The Making of The Round Hill School." Quest IV, April, 1965.

[2] Zeigler, Earle Frederick, "History of Professional Preparation for Physical Education in the United States (1861-1948)," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1950.

SP010 531

educators had identical last names--Allen, (3) both lived the most productive portions of their lifetimes during the same general era--the second half of the nineteenth century, and (4) both individuals played prominent roles in two of the most significant and controversial physical education questions of nineteenth century America: (a) military drill as a required form of school physical training, and (b) the so-called "battle of the systems."

Nathaniel Topliff Allen and the Allen School

Following rapidly on the heels of the Round Hill School experience, which had been implemented by the transplanted German Turner, Kark Beck, and bearing more important future ramification in the development of school physical education, were the functions of a number of New England private and semi public schools under the direction of headmasters, American contemporaries of England's renowned Rugby School espouser of student sporting endeavors, Thomas Arnold.[3] Of these, perhaps the most significant contributions were made by Massachusetts educator Nathaniel Topliff Allen at his school in West Newton, Massachusetts. The school was usually referred to with affectionate zeal by Newtonites as simply, "the Allen School."

The Allen School's unique undertakings in the areas of exercise and sport reflected the educational practice of its founding fathers,

---

[3] Albertson, Roxanne M., "Sports and Games in New England Schools and Academics, 1780-1860." A Paper presented at the Third Annual Conference of The North American Society for Sport History, Boston, Massachusetts, April, 1975.

Horace Mann, Cyrus Peirce, and especially, Nathaniel Topliff Allen, after whom the school was nicknamed. Their collective wisdom, coupled with the physical presence and exertion of Dioclesian Lewis and Catharine Beecher and the interpretations of physical culture expressed by Dr. William A. Alcott, promulgated an educational philosophy which provided a school setting "progressive in spirit and liberal in outlook."

The Allen School existed for almost three-quarters of a century, during which time, particularly in the Antebellum and Civil War Periods of American history, it showcased the most progressive, innovative, and educationally sound approaches to the subject of school physical education yet seen in the Western hemisphere. The preceding statement might seem a bit farfetched but in light of the contributions made to exercise and sport in educational settings by the institution's administrators, faculty, and students, a study of the Allen School is not only appropriate for history's legacy but also supportive of the claim advanced above.

The Allen School was born as a result of North America's first experiment in normal education. A glance at the grandfather geneology of the Allen School and its link to early American normal education might serve to place its ultimate purpose, function and achievements in better perspective.

In July 1839, due chiefly to the efforts of Horace Mann, then Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, the first normal school in North America, and the first in the world for women, was established in Lexington, Massachusetts.[4] Its original student body

---

[4] Greene, Mary A., Nathaniel Topliff Allen: Teacher, Reformer, Philanthropist, (Privately printed, 1906), p. 41.

was composed of but three young women. During the next six years the school's enrollment never rose above thirty-one for any one year, thus prodding the school's critics to question its value in the scheme of emerging public education in the Commonwealth.

In 1845, disturbed by his critics, Mann sought to transfer the institution to a more favourable political and educational environment. He finally decided on the progressive community of West Newton, suburb of nearby Boston. The problem of financial underwriting for the purchase and equipping of a building to house the new school was solved by the immediate response of West Newtonite Josiah Quincy to Mann's impassioned plea: "If you know any man who wishes the highest seat in the Kingdom of Heaven, it is to be had for fifteen-hundred dollars."[5] The Reverend Cyrus Peirce, Harvard educated, and the original principal of the Normal School at Lexington, retained his position as head of the newly established West Newton Institution. An admired teacher whose mere presence in the classroom was a benediction, "Father" Peirce, as he was affectionately known, was to have a long and meritorious career in nineteenth century Massachusetts public and private education.

The original plan for the normal school experiment in Massachusetts included provisions for a common district school as a school of practice, in which normal school students might have actual exercise in the instruction of children. Such a school was known as a Model School and one such entity was established at Lexington as early as the second term of the Normal School at that location. One of the early supervisors of

---

[5] Ibid., p. 42.

the Model School during its tenure of existence in West Newton was Nathaniel Topliff Allen, seventh generation New England descendent of Puritan strain and Pilgrim stock. The Allen family carved its niche in varied form in the early history of the Commonwealth. In fact, the strongly marked characteristics of this family, whose individuality was most apparent, caused the jest first applied to the storied Beecher family to be fitted to the Allens in such a way that the community where they lived was said to be divided into "saints, sinners, and the Allen family."[6] Integrity, uprightness, industry, sobriety, and reverence for religion formed the theme for the effort of life undertaken by the Allens, of which Nathaniel perhaps achieved in the most outstanding manner.

Later in 1853 the Normal School was moved from West Newton to Framingham where it resides to this day in more modern form as the oldest member of the Massachusetts State College system. Nathaniel Allen was invited to continue his role as head of the Model School in the new location. But, due chiefly to the advice of Horace Mann, his most highly held educational colleague, he declined, and instead, established an unsectarian, coeducational, family day school in West Newton, housed in the physical facilities abandoned by the Normal School. On January 1, 1854, Nathaniel Allen expressed his New Year's resolution hope for the new venture: "May the close of this year find me advanced in every good way, and during the year may I ever be ready to lend a helping hand to the unfortunate. God will bless my

---

[6] Ibid., p. 1.

good undertakings."[7] Formally opened in mid January, 1854, and named the West Newton English and Classical School, the institution, over a period of years, achieved several noteworthy landmarks in educational history. Among the most significant were: (1) the development of coeducational high school curricula, (2) the formation of North America's first pure kindergarten based on the concepts of Froebel, and (3) the pioneering of the cause for black youngsters being integrated into the mainstream of American education.

And so embarked the Allen School, an institution which during its half century of history under the supervision of Nathaniel Allen and his brothers, contributed the nearly two millions of dollars received from patrons to the rising economy of Newton and Boston, thus repaying the citizens of those communities and of the Commonwealth for the liberal policy extended to it as an educational institution.[8] Moreover, during that span of years nearly five thousand pupils received instruction in its various departments, coming from every state and territory of the Union; from all countries of North and South America; the West Indies, Canary Islands; Azores; from many European countries, including France, England, Germany, Spain, Italy, and Sweden; and from as far away as distant Japan.

But what of the Allen School and physical education and, even more particularly, this writer's claim that the school provided the most philosophically sound and educationally progressive movement in institutional physical education prior to the end of America's Civil War experience?

---

[7] Ibid., p. 60

[8] Ibid., p. 63

A study of physical education at the Allen School establishes that from the very outset of the school's history much attention and emphasis was laid on the proper physical, as well as mental and moral development of the pupils. Following the lead of its predecessor, the Model School, which had a makeshift, semi-equipped gymnasium in a hall above the main school room as early as 1851, the Allen School, in 1854, became the first secondary school in North America to construct a gymnasium building.[9] In the same year gymnastic apparatus was also set up in the schoolyard. A short time later a bowling alley was added to the gymnasium hall and provisions were made for such athletic sports as football, baseball, boating and swimming. An artificial pond of 5000 square feet was constructed on the nearby estate of James T. Allen, one of Nathaniel's several brothers. There, a competent instructor gave lessons in the art of swimming, while boating of both a competitive and recreational nature took place on the nearby Charles River, soon to become the scene of some of the nineteenth century's most illustrious chapters in crew history.

Every afternoon was devoted to outdoor sports, if the weather permitted; otherwise, indoor sports activity was undertaken in the gymnasium, the bowling alley, or even in the Lyceum Hall, where roller skating on the heavily waxed floor gave both girls and boys great pleasure. James L. Plimpton, inventor of the roller skate, was a cousin of the Allens, so it was natural that this activity be introduced into the school at an early date.

---

[9] Ibid., p. 86.

Nathaniel Allen, most conscious of the restlessness of growing boys and girls, strove to make ample provision for frequent changes in their daily occupation. "Each child," he said, "should read some, study some, and play some, every day, and the boys especially be given an opportunity to let off steam, as a means of disposing of exuberance of spirits, thus making them more likely to be orderly and quiet in school and study-hour."[10] Allen himself, was fully devoted to a life of health and vigor, and was, at the proper time, "a boy with his boys," leading a game of snowballing, cheering and encouraging by applause the ball teams, making it a principle to be in touch with all the sports, and even suggesting new ones from time to time. Cricket, baseball and football clubs were part of the life of the school.

In later years Allen harbored certain reservations as to the merit of football as an educationally sound exercise activity, but only to the extent that he felt the game had degenerated to by the end of the century. Concerning his thoughts on the matter we find some notes:

> Outdoor exercises, hare and hounds, skating, wrestling, are as developing to physical endurance, without the brutality that now characterizes the game, and I should even prefer boxing. It (football) is not a game for girls, and it is not suitable for one tenth of the boys. It does, if rightly played, develop courage, grit, and perseverance, and, should it ever be improved in a way to eliminate the brutality, I judge it would be one of the most valuable of outdoor games. 11

Supervision of sport at the Allen School was exacting and constant

---

10 Ibid., p. 116.

11 Ibid., p. 117.

so that no game could degenerate into brutality. Even at the informal playtimes referred to as recess, at least one of the gentleman teachers was in the schoolyard with the boys to observe and guide their sports activity.

Physical education at the Allen School received specialized attention other than that given to it naturally through the media of sports, games and less structured exercise. The first lectures ever given in an institutional setting based on the teaching of William A. Alcott, as reflected in his book, "The Laws of Health," were delivered at the Allen School as common fare in discussions of health and body fitness.[12]

But even more important to the physical education prospectus of the Allen School was the affiliation with its program of Dioclesian Lewis, "apostle of temperance," and a person who, by 1860, was developing a reputation as an innovator and implementer of physical fitness and health exercises. Lewis settled in Boston in 1860 and immediately sought employment on the faculty of the Allen School. He was appointed to a position as lecturer on practical physiology. Lewis remained at the school as an instructor in "the laws of health" for a period of eight years, during which time his knowledge, zeal, expertise in oratory and indefatigable nature made him a recognized name in physical fitness and exercise, even in some of the most remote corners of America.[13] There at the Allen School, Lewis presented the first

---

[12] Smith, S.F., History of Newton Massachusetts, Town and City: 1630-1880, (Boston: The American Logo Type Company, 1880), p. 727.

[13] Barney, Robert Knight, "Adele Parot: Beacon of The Dioclesian Lewis School of Gymnastic Expression in The American West," Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education, Vol. V, No. 2, December 1974.

classes in free gymnastics to be taught in Massachusetts. And there, too, Lewis modified his concept of Swedish gymnastics to form what he referred to as his "new gymnastics." From Lewis' lectures on physical culture, delivered early in his career at the Allen School, sprang the real philosophical and practical essence of his later literary contributions.

Much has been reported of Dioclesian Lewis' work in founding what has come to be recognized as the first normal school for physical education preparation in North America. And indeed, history has accorded due attention to his writings on physical culture. Nothing to date has been reported of his connection with the Allen School, aside from brief mention (two sentences) of the fact by the eminent and painstaking historian, Fred E. Leonard.[14] This is perplexing when one fully considers the history and significance of the West Newton institution and those who were associated with it over the years.

Allen School educators played crucial roles in the drama relating to one of educational history's most controversial issues, at least in terms of public school physical education. That controversy involved the challenge to the play, games and gymnastic calisthenics concept of physical education by compulsory military drill. Legislation surrounding the question of military drill was aimed at improving the fitness of students, particularly when those students were viewed in the context of future soldiers bearing arms in defense of the cherished Union. A note on the leadership of Allen School educators in helping to defeat the proposed legislation is certainly in keeping with the thrust of this general analysis.

---

[14] Leonard, Fred Eugene and Affleck, George B., The History of Physical Education, (Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger, 1947) p. 259.

Shortly after Nathaniel Allen had opened the West Newton English and Classical School, several years before America's tragic Civil War, he had introduced military drill into the curriculum as an experiment in practical considerations for physical education. The experiment lasted but two years, at which time it was discontinued with all involved being supremely convinced of its inutility.[15] Lewis, for reasons associated with his profound dislike for anything rigid and regimented in the form of exercise, also looked unfavourably on such activity.

In 1864 the bills were brought before the attention of the Military Affairs Committee of the Massachusetts legislature.[16] The essence of the legislation was to provide muskets to the schools and to require military drill for all public school boys fourteen years and over in age. The cost of professional drillmasters and the muskets was to be borne by the Commonwealth. As a progressive and liberal educator, Nathaniel Allen objected most vigorously to the proposed measures. Allen appealed to the legislative committee for a hearing on his viewpoints. His request was approved. At once Allen set about the task of substantiating his arguments. Aside from his own impassioned words before the committee, which moved him to comment afterwards, "like a Quaker, the spirit moved," the most formidable weapon in Allen's arsenal was the able assistance of his West Newton English and Classical School colleague, Dr. Dioclesian Lewis.[17]

---

15 Greene, op. cit., p. 68.

16 Ibid., p. 193

17 Ibid., p. 195

In response to the testimony of two school teachers from Boston's Latin and English High Schools, whose institutions had both experimented with the drilling exercise earlier that same year, and who declared that the lads had all increased in height and weight during the period of activity, "not a remarkable phenomenon with boys of fifteen," Allen countered with rebuttals which he felt had more scientific substance. In the Hall of Representatives, before a large audience, a soldier with musket in hand, went through the full manual of arms. Dio Lewis stood nearby, verbally analyzing each particular muscle movement involved, supporting and embellishing Allen's arguments in a most proficient display of his remarkable oratory. Not content with a clear demonstration that only a small number of the body's muscles were necessarily brought into use during the manual, Lewis brought forward a young lady graduate of his Normal School of Gymnastics in downtown Boston who, upon command, went through a course of exercises "calculated to develop symmetrically the physical organization."[18]

According to Allen's account of the results of this drama, "None were more astonished, or more ready to admit the superiority of this system of gymnastics to military drill for schools than were the two West Point graduates on the committee,"[19] each of whom sat in the assembly room that day. In the end, the bills were withdrawn from consideration. Agitation for compulsory military drill in the Commonwealth's public schools rose from time to time but Allen and his

---

[18] Ibid., p. 198

[19] Ibid.,

colleagues remained ever vigilant in their attack on the entire concept. Allen took great delight in rebuffing Ullyses Grant's support of such legislative measures by reminding the General of his own words, once spoken before a large assembly--words outlining his ideas on citizen military preparedness:

> We have, of course, no standing army, but every man in the crowd under forty years of age can become a good soldier in five minutes. 20

Returning to Dio Lewis and his several years of gymnastics teaching at the Allen School, it is evident that Nathaniel Allen thought no other physical educator or system of exercise could rival Lewis and his "new gymnastics." Allen stated, "he (Lewis) was the pioneer in light gymnastics for schools; his system of gymnastics, like Warren Colburn's Mental Arithmetic, has, I judge, never been improved upon."[21]

Speaking more specifically about Lewis' role in the history of the Allen School, Nathaniel Allen commented, "No one else has presented his subjects with such interest and power, nor have I ever found a system of gymnastics so effectual for good. The pupils were aroused to enthusiasm; such enthusiasm as I have never seen kindled in my school by any other lecturer."[22]

Catharine Beecher, Lewis' contemporary in the physical education of the times, also related to the Allen School for a short period. Horace Mann, during most of the 1850's and early 1860's, resided on Chestnut Street in West Newton, where his house was always open for the

---

20 Ibid., p. 201

21 Ibid., p. 193

22 Ibid., p. 76

visits of close friends, many of them residing with him and his wife for extended periods of time. More often than not Mann's guests shared his same interests--education and literature. Among the almost constant stream of visitors were Elizabeth Peabody, "Apostle of the Kindergarten System in North America;" Nathaniel Hawthorne, the famous novelist; and Catharine Beecher, sister of Henry Ward Beecher, and a famous educator in her own right. The wisdom and experiences of these and other guests were seldom allowed to lay inert during visits to West Newton. Lecture presentations and close personal relationship between Mann and his friends and educators of the Allen School were commonplace. Much of Beecher's expressed thought on physical education contributed toward the formal exercise philosophy espoused and displayed by the Allen School.

From the foregoing commentary it appears quite evident that Nathaniel Topliff Allen and the West Newton English and Classical School should both be accorded their rightfully merited recognition as genuine pioneers in American institutional sport and physical education. With that in mind let us turn our attention to another aspect of "The Allen File."

Mary E. Allen and the Allen School of Gymnastics

In the autumn of 1889 a young lady from Boston named Clara Ballard arrived on the campus of the University of Wisconsin in Madison to commence a course of instruction in physical training for women students. The course was voluntary in nature, each student paying a small fee for Miss Ballard's instruction. Within a year of her arrival Miss Ballard's popularity and demonstrated knowledge and expertise in physical education

gained for her an appointment as a full time member of the university's staff as "instructor in gymnastics for women."[23] One of the compelling reasons for the appointment of Ballard to the university's teaching faculty was her professional background, the most notable achievement of which, at least in the eyes of the Board of Regents who approved the recommended appointment, was her prior educational experience gained at "the Allen School of Gymnastics in Boston."[24]

When one stops to probe into the place of the Allen School of Gymnastics in the history of physical education teacher preparation the consistent result is general bewilderment that any such entity ever existed. Zeigler, in his exhaustive study of the history of physical education professional preparation in America,[25] knows nothing of an Allen School of Gymnastics, in Boston or elsewhere. Fred Leonard, perhaps physical education's most painstaking recorder of the past, makes not even passing reference to the name Mary Allen or to an Allen School of Gymnastics.[26] A complete vacuum, pertinent to Mary Allen's legacy to history, is avoided by Bennett in his doctoral study on the life of Dudley Allen Sargent.[27] In laying the claim that the Sargent School, founded in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1881, was the first American normal school of physical education exclusively for women,

---

[23] Struna, Nancy and Remley, Mary L., "Physical Education for women at The University of Wisconsin, 1863-1913: A Half Century of Progress," Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education, Vol. IV, No. I, May, 1973, p. 15.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Zeigler, op. cit.

[26] Leonard and Affleck, op. cit.

[27] Bennett, Bruce Lanyon, "Dudley Allen Sargent M.D. and his contributions to physical Education," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1947.

Bennett made reference to Mary Allen and, further, offered the following comments relative to any assertions that might perhaps be offered as to why the previously mentioned distinction should not instead be accorded to Mary Allen's School of Gymnastics.

> In 1878 Miss Mary Allen opened a women's gymnasium in Boston which graduated seven instructeresses by 1889. However the teacher training course at the Allen gymnasium was not proposed until 1881-82 according to a circular of the gymnasium. It is not known whether any normal school students attended that year or not, which was the same year that Sargent opened his school. The Allen gymnasium did not survive so that the claim of the Sargent School as the oldest normal school of physical training for women still in existence is clear and unquestioned. 28

Bennett's work, written in 1947, provides physical education historians with their first clue as to the existence of an Allen School of Gymnastics. Struna's and Remley's work, published in 1973, presents a brief allusion to such a school having been present in the late nineteenth century but offers no further insight into the subject. The gap existing between the two brief testimonies can perhaps be reconsiled to some extent by the following.

The Allen School of Gymnastics realized a life of thirteen years, being established in 1878 at 503 Washington Street in what is today the very heart of downtown Boston. In 1886 new quarters for the school were founded at the corner of Garrison and St. Botolph Streets.[29] The Allen School, sometimes referred to as "The Ladies Gymnasium," was a large, airy room of some 11,000 square feet which serviced the

---

[28] Ibid., pp. 98-99

[29] Boston Transcript, January 18, 1889.

fitness needs of from 400 to 500 members yearly, all of whom were either women or children.[30] The gymnastic program of the school, championed by its director, Mary Allen, was not particularly new or innovative, even for its time in history. In fact, despite the assertion that her's was still another in the spectrum of well known late nineteenth century "systems of exercise, an analysis of her approach leaves little doubt that her fundamental base was that of Ling's, with perhaps isolated elements of Dio Lewis' and Delsarte's systems added. Nevertheless, in noting Miss Allen's system and her contributions to physical education in Boston during the 1880's, school officials were moved to state:

> Miss Mary E. Allen of this city, has for a number of years past maintained a large and well-appointed gymnasium, in which she has put in practice a system of gymnastic training, having many original and useful features, so that the results of her system and its application in her gymnasium have been gratifying , and have recieved high recommendation. 31

That aspect of The Allen School of Gymnastics dedicated to the professional preparation of prospective physical education teachers appears, also, to have been limited in its scope of achievement. Even though the school was reported to have "graduated seven instructeresses by 1889," the record of attainment of its normal graduates is indeed scant. In fact, only Clara Ballard appears to have won a place in physical education's historical literature. Ballard's contributions as a bonafide pioneer of women's physical education at the University of Wisconsin in the 1890's, setting the basis for the work of such

---

[30] Ibid.

[31] "School Document No. 15-1890: Report of The Committee on Physical Trainings," (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, City Printers, 1890), p .10.

outstanding more-contemporary leaders at that institution as Clarke Heatherington, William G. Anderson, Abby Shaw Mayhew and Blanche Trilling,[32] provides the only documented record known at this time of the professional preparation function of the Allen School of Gymnastics.

The Allen School of Gymnastics met its demise in 1891, due, in particular, to the aftermath in Boston of the now well known nineteenth century American physical education phenomena--"the battle of the systems." A heavily debated issue, during the years 1888, 1889 and 1890, was the political skirmish among Boston school authorities regarding which system of physical education should be adopted by the city's public schools as the official exercise pursuit of schoolchildren. In January, 1890 the Boston Board of Education referred the whole subject of physical training in the public schools to a specially appointed Committee on Physical Training,[33] the member's of which were: William A. Mowry, chairman, J.P.C. Winship (no relation to Dr. George Winship, devotee of heavy weight training systems of exercise), Elizabeth C. Keller, George E. Mecuen, and Caroline Hastings.[34] The committee met frequently and studied intently all systems of exercise prevalent in North America during the past several decades. Certainly the city of Boston had ardent espousers of each pursuit. No system of exercise was left unexplored by the committee. The teachings of Pehr Henrik Ling,

---

[32] Struna and Remley, op. cit., pp. 21-26.

[33] School Document No. 15-1890, op. cit., p. 3.

[34] Ibid., p. 23.

German Turners, Dio Lewis, Delsarte, Sargent, Hitchcock, Winship etc., all received support from various quarters. The champion of Mary E. Allen and her approach to exercise was Caroline Hastings, a firm admirer of "the Ladies Gymnasium" and its program. The debated merits of other systems were often given only scant attention by Hastings as the months of debate and study on the subject wore on. Her espousal of the Allen System, as the system best suited for public school purposes, remained steadfast throughout the committee's deliberations.

Coupled with Hastings' lobbeying as a member of the Committee on Physical Training were the activities of Mary E. Allen herself. Allen played a formidable role on the Arrangements Committee for the Annual Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education (now AAHPER), held on April 5, 1890 in Mechanics Hall on Huntington Avenue.[35] From her gymnasium courses of instruction Allen brought to the convention proceedings two significant gymnastic demonstrations. The first was a series of eleven hoop exercises, while the second involved 120 women and children performing series of elementary dumbbell drills.[36]

Despite the combined efforts of Allen and Hastings the "Allen system" disappeared from any serious consideration by the Committee. The protracted illness of Hastings and her subsequent absence from

---

[35] Announcement-American Association for The Advancement of Physical Education, 1890.

[36] Ibid.

meetings near the end, and therefore the most crucial phase of the committee's mission made the task of her committee opposition comparatively simple.[37] A strong consensus emerged favoring the adoption of the pure Ling system. Such a recommendation was made by the committee and ultimately accepted by the Board of Education. Shortly thereafter the Boston Herald announced: "Physical training Ling System adopted for all Boston Schools."[38]

And thus ended the real impact in the physical education of the times of Mary E. Allen, Boston schoolteacher for over ten years, proprietor and director of the Allen School of Gymnastics and "the Ladies Gymnasium," and espouser of a code of exercise and body movement ethic which gained for her recognition as the innovator of still another system to be fed into the maelstrom of considerations surrounding the noted Boston Conference of 1889, which, incidentally, opened its deliberations and airing of physical education issues of the times on November 28, 1889, exactly one year previous to the date of the Herald's public newspaper announcement of Boston's public school acceptance of the Ling System.[39]

Epilogue

Before closing the file on the Allens of Massachusetts a question might be pondered. Given the identical last names, the same general era of events, the extremely close geographical proximity of their

---

[37] School Document-No.15-1890, op. cit.

[38] Boston Herald, November 27, 1890.

[39] Weston, Arthur, The Making of American Physical Education, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1962), pp. 37-39.

"action arenas," and the parallel richness in background and purpose relative to physical education, might not Mary E. Allen have been related to Nathaniel Topliff Allen? An interesting point is aroused along this line of speculation when one observes Mary Allen's middle initial. Could the letter E stand for Ellis, the family name of Nathaniel Allen's mother?[40] The name Ellis became a popular middle name for generation after generation of Allen offspring. In fact, Nathaniel's older brother George and younger sister Abigail were christened with the middle name Ellis.[41] Could Mary E. Allen possibly have been a niece of Nathaniel Allen? A review of the faculty and student roles of the West Newton English and Classical School from 1854 to 1893 does not reveal any record of a Mary E. Allen,[42] either as a faculty member or a student. Hence, it would seem at this point and time that physical education history researchers have still to uncover the relationship, if any, between the Allens of the West Newton institution and the Allen of the Allen School of Gymnastics. The personal geneology of Mary E. Allen remains shrouded in the cobwebs of history.

Nathaniel Allen's life, on the other hand, reflects no mystery. He was born on September 29, 1823, fittingly, the same year as the founding of physical education at the Round Hill School. His pursuit

---

40 Greene, op. cit., pp. 12-14.

41 Ibid., pp. 14-15.

42 An Illustrated Biographical Catalogue of The Principals, Teachers, and Students of The West Newton English and Classical School, West Newton, Massachusetts: 1854-1893, (Boston: Rand Avery Supply Company, 1895).

and achievement of his life's goals were mirrored in his physical presence and dedication:

> His physical strength was not known, even to himself, but, under Dr. Winship's gymnastic plan, after two months' training, he lifted eleven hundred and fifty pounds. Dr. Dio Lewis considered him the strongest man he ever knew. He himself attributed his power of endurance, in spite of a lifetime spent in the classroom and at the desk, to the care he took to preserve the strength he had received by inheritance, by a life of industry, frugality, and temperance, with regular daily exercise in the open air, daily cold baths, and regular hours for sleep. 43

Mary Greene, Allen's biographer, has applied a fitting epitah to any commentary on Nathaniel Topliff Allen:

> He was a Puritan of Puritans, the whole life was bent to moral ideals. But he was a Puritan fully abreast of the thought of his time, broad and liberal, applying the Puritan conscience to the solution of the problems of his day ard generation.44

And thus the file on the Allens is closed for the time being - two sagas in the history of physical education: one of fairly major importance and one perhaps slightly less so. Two facts emerge from the preceding. First, the pieces of the mosaic reflecting America's nineteenth century exercise expression and approach to physical education draw a bit closer together in perspective. And secondly, the path pursued here is perhaps opened for even further exploration by future scholars of our profession's heritage.

50

---

43 Greene, op. cit.

44 Ibid., pp. 229-230.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Albertson, Roxanne M. "Sport and Games in New England Schools and Academies, 1780-1860." A Paper presented at the Third Annual Conference of the North American Society for Sport History, Boston, Massachusetts, April 1975.

An Illustrated Biographical Catalogue of the Principals, Teachers, and Students of the West Newton English and Classical School, West Newton, Massachusetts: 1854-1893. Boston: Rand Avery Printing Company, 1895.

Announcement-American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education, 1890.

Barney, Robert Knight. "A historical reinterpretation of the forces underlying the first state legislation for physical education in the public schools of the U.S." Research Quarterly Vol. 44, No. 3, October 1973.

Barney, Robert Knight. "Adele Parot: Beacon of the Dioclesian Lewis School of Gymnastic Expression in the American West," Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education Vol. V, No. 2, December 1974.

Bennett, Bruce Lanyon. "Dudley Allen Sagrent, M.D. and his contributions to physical education," Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1947.

Bennett, Bruce L. "The Making of the Round Hill School," Quest 1V, April 1965.

Boston Herald. November 27, 1890.

Boston Transcript. January 18, 1889.

Eastman, Mary F. Biography of Dio Lewis, M.D. New York: Fowler Wells Company, Publishers, 1891.

Gerber, Ellen W. Innovators and Institutions in Physical Education. Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger, 1971.

Greene, Mary A. Nathaniel Topliff Allen: Teacher, Reformer, Philanthropist. Privately Printed, 1906.

Jackson, Francis. History of Newton, Massachusetts: 1639-1800. Boston: Stacy and Richardson Printers, 1854.

Leonard, Fred Eugene and Affleck, George B. The History of Physical Education. Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger, 1947.

Mills, Paul R. "William Andrus Alcott, M.D.: Pioneer Reformer in Physical Education, 1798-1859," Proceedings: National College Physical Education Association for Men, 1973.

Rowe, Henry K. Tercentenary History of Newton: 1630-1930. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Murrary Printing Company, 1930.

Smith, S. F. History of Newton, Massachusetts, Town and City: 1630-1880. Boston: The American Logotype Company, 1880.

Struna, Nancy and Remley, Mary L. "Physical Education for women at the University of Wisconsin, 1863-1913," Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Edcuation Vol. IV, No. 1, May 1973.

Twenty Seventh Annual Report of the Board of Education--Public Document No. 2. Boston: Wright and Potter State Printers, 1864.

Weston, Arthur. The Making of American Physical Education. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1962.

Zeigler, Earle Frederick. "A History of Professional Preparation in Physical Education in the United States." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Yale University, 1950.